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PERSPECTIVES ON THE WORLD

By Edward Neilan



N. Korea ventures into dynastic rule

Communism's first venture into dynastic rule will occur in October when Kim Jong-il, son of North Korean President Kim Il-sung, officially steps into his father's shoes.

That, at least, is the consensus of whispers emanating from various intelligence agencies and from the very select group of specialists known as North Korea watchers. Japan's Public Security Investigation Agency (PSIA), a government body which gathers information on and analyzes the activities of communist nations, has said recently that Pyongyang appears to be in the final stages of transfer of power.

Succession in North Korea is one of several changes due at the top of Asian nations over the next few years. President Chiang Ching-kuo of the Republic of China on Taiwan, President Ferdinand Marcos of The Philippines, President Suharto of Indonesia, China's Deng Xiaoping, Burma's Ne Win, Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew and the aging collective leadership of Vietnam all will be absent from the Asian power picture within a few years.

In every case, there are elements of uncertainty about the policies the country will follow under new leadership. This could contribute to instability in the region.

In no situation is the uncertainty more pronounced than in North Korea.

Kim Il-sung has ruled North Korea since 1945, when the peninsula was freed from 35 years of Japanese occupation but was divided along the 38th parallel to ease the disarming of Japanese forces at the end of World War II.

So little is known of son Kim Jong-il that descriptions of him usually dwell on physical characteristics and habits rather than ideological or intellectual qualities. One rather disrespectful Western commentator described the younger Mr. Kim as possessing a "heroic abdominal overhang, known in most Western circles as a beer belly." He is also said to be a chain smoker, like his father.

The heir apparent turned 43 in February and the state-controlled North Korean media began immediately to heap additional praise on him. He has been described as an outstanding leader of the ruling Workers (Communist) Party in directing the nation to complete the ideological, technical and cultural revolution started by his father.

The younger Mr. Kim was awarded the title of "hero" on his 40th birthday and is now called "the dear leader" by the North Korean media. The elder Mr. Kim is referred to as "the respected leader" or "the great leader." The word "leader" is reserved exclusively for the two Kims and the term "party center" is a euphemism or code name for the younger Mr. Kim in official publications.

Some intelligence assessments had earlier intimated that there was resistance from senior North Korean military officers to the younger Mr. Kim's elevation because of his relative inexperience in anything but party affairs. Two years ago there were rumors of an assassination attempt on him. Speculation became rampant when the North Koreans purchased 14 bulletproof Cadillac limousines through a Japanese dealer who had some heavy-duty modifications made in Yokohama before shipping the autos on to North Korea.

There was speculation that both Moscow and Peking were at least mildly upset at the prospect of North Korea providing communism's first hereditary dynasty. More than likely, they are delighted at the rigidity that the perpetuation of the Kim dynasty implies.

Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Kapitsa conferred Moscow's blessings on the younger Mr. Kim in a visit to Pyongyang last November. In June 1983, China did the same on a 12-day visit during which Mr. Kim met Mr. Deng and other top Chinese leaders.

The younger Mr. Kim has been the second-highest ranking North Korean since 1980 when he was placed No. 2 in the 10-member party secretariat after his father, who is general secretary. That is the title the younger Mr. Kim is expected to assume in October.

He also has joined the five-man policy-making presidium of the politburo, the 19-member politburo and the 10-member military commission.

Some American observers express casual "Who cares?" reactions to discussion of leadership change in the world's most thoroughly regimented and communized nation.

But intelligence analysts are watching for signs of friction and resentment within the upper echelons of the military and any tendencies toward irrationality on the part of the younger Mr. Kim that might lead to military adventure against South Korea.

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